

Introduction

"You need to use your brain to think of other solutions, use your heart to love libraries, and use your courage to keep them open." – 6 Year old Richard Lowenburg, speaking against closing the Mount Health branch library, Cincinnati Post, August 28.

Although Richard was talking about closing a branch of a library, his words send a message to those of us who struggle to provide quality library service in changing times. We must be creative in finding solutions to our problems. And we must remember the important role we play in our communities and in the hearts of our children.

This handbook is designed to help you through the process of forming a library district. It is divided into several stages with information about each stage and the steps you must take to form a library district. Before we begin talking about what you must accomplish to create a library district, we would like to take a moment to introduce li-

brary districts – what they are and why you might want to consider them.

We would like to thank the Idaho State Library for generously sharing their district handbook. Much of this handbook is adapted from the "Idaho Library Districting Handbook: 1999-2000 edition."

What is a library district in Montana?

A library district is a governmental unit with an elected board of trustees having the power to estab-

lish a property tax mill levy for library services. Voters in the district create a library district through an

election. A library district must contain territory with a taxable value of at least \$5 million.

Reasons to consider a library district

- Quality library service in our local communities is an essential part of our economic development, quality of life, and education.
- Library service is not free or cheap.

Potential benefits of a library district

- Could help areas with lower property values maintain quality library services.
- Allow public libraries to combine under a new administrative structure, which offers the potential for improved library services and cost savings through sharing costs, such as administrative, personnel, collections, and technology.
- Electors can establish and dissolve districts by direct vote.
- Members of the Board of Trustees are elected.
- Members of the Board of Trustees have the power to levy, within limits.
- Through elected trustees, libraries become directly linked to the people that they serve.
- City councils and county commissioners are freed from many of their administrative and governing responsibilities to the library.
- Communities can use the library district to improve an important and essential public service.
- Provide the opportunity for more stable funding.

Potential disadvantages of becoming a library district

- ◆ Forming a library district may not be the right answer for all areas.
- ◆ Some local control is given up.
- ◆ Holding a successful election takes a considerable effort.
- ◆ Electors can establish and dissolve districts by a direct vote.
- ◆ The complexity of forming a government entity takes a great deal of time and effort.

What are the differences between governing structures of libraries?

See the chart on the next two pages for a comparison of county, city, multijurisdictional, and district libraries.

Who to contact for help?

- ◆ Darlene Staffeldt, State Librarian, (406) 444-3115 or dstaffeldt@mt.gov
- ◆ Bob Cooper, Director of Library Development, (406) 444-5431 or bocooper@mt.gov
- ◆ Tracy Cook, Statewide Technology Librarian (406) 761-7120 or tcook@mtlib.org
- ◆ Suzanne Reymer, Statewide Technology Librarian (406) 255-0729 or sreymer@mtlib.org

Chart Comparing Difference Between Library Governance Structures in Montana

	City/County	Interlocal	Multijurisdictional	District
Creation	Resolution by governing body (city council or county commissioners) MCA 22-1-303	Contract between agencies for library services. Agreement is filed with county clerk or Secretary of State. MCA 7-11-101 thru 7-11-108	Interlocal agreement and ordinance or interlocal agreement and petition with signatures from 15% of registered voters. MCA 7-11-1105	Begin with petition with signatures from 15% of registered voters in proposed district or with a resolution from county commissioners. Requires open hearing and an election. MCA 22-1-702
Governance	Board of trustees are appointed by governing body (Mayor of city or chairman of County Commissioners) MCA 22-1-308	Governance is determined by contract. See MCA 7-11-105	Specified in interlocal agreement. Usually the same as city/county setup. MCA 7-11-111	Initial board is appointed by governing body of county. MCA 22-1-704 Voters within the district elect subsequent trustees. MCA 22-1-706
Finances	Receive money from city and/or county general fund. Library may also receive a property tax levy specifically for library subject to MCA 15-10-420.	Interlocal agreement determines what parties will pay to finance library services. MCA 7-11-105	Ordinance lists the mill levy (subject to MCA 15-10-420) necessary to finance library services. See also MCA 7-11-1106 and 7-11-1112.	Initial vote for district determines the maximum mill levy for the library (subject to MCA 15-10-420. See also MCA 22-1-703)
Dissolution	Resolution by governing body or petition of the people. MCA 22-1-303.	Dissolution is determined in interlocal agreement. Generally done by one or both parties in writing. MCA 7-11-105	Dissolution is determined in interlocal agreement. Generally done by one or both parties in writing. MCA 7-11-105	Dissolution begins with a resolution by library board or governing body or a petition signed by 15% of voters. Final dissolution occurs with election. MCA 22-1-710

Chart Comparing Difference Between Library Governance Structures in Montana (continued)

	City/County	Interlocal	Multijurisdictional	District
Board Powers and Duties	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have exclusive control of budget, construction or lease of library buildings; and operation and care of the library• Adopt bylaws for the board and library• Have the power to contract to give and receive library services• Have the power to acquire property for the library• Pay necessary expenses of library staff• Prepare an annual budget• Make an annual report• Accept gifts, etc.• Exercise such other powers, not inconsistent with law• MCA 22-1-309	Determined by contract, but generally the same as City/County. MCA 7-11-105.	Same as City/County. MCA 7-11-111(4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Operate and maintain library property; conduct programs; make improvements to property• Prepare annual budgets• Pay necessary expenses of staff members• Prepare and submit records to Montana State Library• Employ or contract with personnel or other entities to receive or give library services• Acquire, own, and maintain property for the district• Adopt bylaws for the operation of the district• Establish a property tax mill levy• Accept donations• Establish a depreciation fund• Exercise other powers, not inconsistent with the law• MCA 22-1-707